How to Use Nutrition for Diabetic Neuropathy

Imagine sitting a movie with your legs crossed. After you uncross them, you begin to feel these weird sensations of numbness and tingling in your feet. The good news is that it will eventually go away. Now imagine having numbness and tingling the never goes away completely. This is the case for millions of people that may or may not know that the have diabetes. The term is referring to as diabetic neuropathy. Neuropathies are conditions caused by damage mainly affecting the peripheral nervous system. Symptoms can be described as burning, numbness, tingling, pins and needles, swelling, pain, weakness, electric shocks, and throbbing.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), **diabetes now affects nearly 21 million Americans** (7 percent of the U.S. population) and approximately 6 million of those people do not know they have diabetes. This number represents an additional 2.6 million people with diabetes since 2002. Another 41 million people are estimated to have pre-diabetes, a condition that increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease as well as heart disease and stroke. “Diabetes is a leading cause of adult blindness, lower-limb amputation, kidney disease and nerve damage. Two-thirds of people with diabetes die from a heart attack or stroke,” said Dr. Frank Vinicor, director of CDC’s diabetes program.

What can be done?

It is said that once a person has neuropathy due to diabetes, the only thing left is to help prevent further loss of nerve function. This may be true for some, but others have been able to reduce their symptoms through nutrition and dietary changes. Nerves do have a chance to regenerate themselves, however the process can be extremely long. The insult to nerve tissue needs to be limited in order for proper recovery. This usually means controlling proper blood sugar levels everyday. When done successfully, a person should see some type of change in their condition. There should also be changes in other aspects of their health such as mood, bladder, memory, sleep and possible a reduction in dizziness. Along with dietary changes, there are certain supplements or nutritional protocols the one can follow.

High blood sugar can have negative effects on nerve function as it produces chemical by-products that result in oxidative damage / stress to nerve tissue. Mitochondria are the powerhouse of a cell. When the powerhouse is feed too much fuel (glucose), it releases more waste products than normal. This is equivalent to large amounts of waste emitted from a power plant released into the air. Eventually, it will pollute the air and result in health condition among the people around the plant. One way to help combat the affects of oxidative stress place on nerves and the surrounding tissue are antioxidants. Antioxidants are found in many different sources such as blackberry, strawberry, raspberry, blueberry, black currant, walnuts, sunflower seeds, pomegranate, and ginger. Consequently, be changing your dietary habits, you will most likely increase your antioxidant intake.

Are there other nutritional therapies to use?

Nutrition can be used in multiple areas when dealing with blood sugar control and neuropathy. As mentioned above, antioxidants such as glutathione, alpha lipoic acid, Vitamin C, Vitamin E and Essential Fatty Acid (fish oil) are beneficial for counteracting the effects of oxidation. Other nutrition such as acetyl-L-carnitine (ALC) can be used to help with possible regeneration of nerve tissue. Finally, when dealing with diabetic neuropathy, it can be extremely useful to use supplements to help control blood sugar while dietary changes are being

implemented. The following nutrients and herbs have been shown to help Gymnema Sylvestre, Bitter Melon, Fenugreek, chromium, amino acids, vanadium, Guar Gum, inositol, and certain mushrooms.

Where do I begin?

It is important to find a qualified healthcare practitioner when beginning a nutritional / supplementation regime. Having a practitioner to help guide you is extremely valuable in setting up protocols, implementing nutrition, and monitoring your success. If applicable, your physician should be informed of any changes, diet and/or nutrition, as the dose of medications may need to be altered.